



“Leninism or Marxism?”

What we have with today’s two texts – [Rosa Luxemburg](#)’s so-called “[Leninism or Marxism?](#)”, and [Lenin’s reply](#) to it, (attached; downloads are linked below) – is a partial record of an attempted comprehensive political mugging of V I Lenin at an early stage.

By 1904 Lenin was already widely recognised as the most clear-minded and exceptional revolutionary leader in the world, including by his opportunist, reformist Russian opponents, and also by the leaders of the well-established, quite large, and legal “Social Democracy” of Germany (the German Social-Democratic Party).

Reading Lenin’s 1904 reply it is clear that at this point the gains of the Second Congress of the RSDLP had already been lost, and that not only Rosa Luxemburg, but also the “Pope” of Social Democracy at the time – the German, [Karl Kautsky](#) –

had turned against Lenin. So had [Georgi Plekhanov](#), one of the founders of Russian socialist exile politics (the [Emancipation of Labour Group](#)) who had been Lenin's close comrade in their "brilliant three-year campaign" prior to the Second Congress, based around the magazine *Iskra*, of which Lenin had been the founder and editor.

The Mensheviks had got back into power after their defeat at the 1903 RSDLP Second Congress by special pleading and blackmail. Once inside the political tent, they had forced out the Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks now controlled *Iskra*, and hardly allowed the Bolsheviks to have any space in it. They controlled the RSDLP Central Committee, and were refusing to hold another Congress. The Mensheviks even wanted to expel Lenin for the fact that he had founded another magazine called *Vperyod*, which later became *Proletary*, to carry on the work of the old *Iskra*.

This is when, in 1904, we find Rosa Luxemburg, who had in 1900 resoundingly vanquished the chief reformist, Bernstein, now attacking Lenin. It is hard not to think that she has been deceived into turning 180 degrees in this way, against her natural ally, Lenin, especially in the light of the subsequent history when in 1914 Lenin and Luxemburg became the two most outstanding opponents of the capitulation of the Second International to national chauvinism, Imperialism and war.

In 1914 the German Social Democrats, under Kautsky, voted to support the Imperialist war. Rosa refused, and instead she helped start the Spartacus League, a German equivalent of the

Russian Bolsheviks, who had also refused to support the war. Kautsky's sell-out was eventually damned by Lenin in his classic 1918 work "[The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky](#)", but Kautsky continued spreading lies until his death in 1938. Rosa Luxemburg did not sell out. She died a martyr in 1919 at the hands of the reactionary fore-runners of German fascism, the Freikorps.

Back in 1904 it looks as if Lenin is isolated, with only Comrade Galyorka to support him. Yet he staged a comeback, to become in practice the greatest revolutionary leader the world has ever known. How did this happen? From other writings it is clear that Lenin, both before the Congress and after it, was relying not on the top leaders, nor on the more remote intellectuals, but upon those much closer to the working-class rank-and-file.

Lenin had done what the supporters of Jacob Zuma did from 2005 to 2007 in South Africa. He had made sure that the branches were with him, and he with them.

With the help of the base, Lenin pulled the superstructure back into shape. The third RSDLP Congress, held in 1905, was a firmly Bolshevik Congress.

Rosa Luxemburg's essay, when read with the benefit of Lenin's reply, is revealed as a very poor piece of work indeed. It happens to the best of us. People make mistakes.

The subsequent history of this document of Rosa's, as told by

MIA, is one of repeated exploitation of Rosa Luxemburg's temporary mistake. It has been reprinted several times, but always without the inclusion of Lenin's reply. Rosa was used in her lifetime, to write this false denunciation of Lenin for "military ultra-centralism" and other spurious accusations, and after her death she continued to be so used.

The denunciation in the title (which is not Luxemburg's title) is false, because there is no opposition between "Leninism" and "Marxism".

The whole story is a classic case-study in political deception, recovery, and triumph over deception. But to know that, you must read Lenin's reply.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Leninism or Marxism?, Rosa Luxemburg, 1904](#), and [Lenin's Reply to Rosa Luxemburg, 1904](#).
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